Serving the Public Online:

The Award-Winning Web Site of Silicon Valley's Superior Court

Judge James P. Kleinberg
Superior Court of Santa Clara County

With special thanks and acknowledgment to Sharon Marcacci, Web Manager; Hannah Barletta and Barry Lynch, former and current Information Services Division Directors; and Kiri Torre, Executive Officer, Superior Court of Santa Clara County

Perhaps it is not surprising that an outstanding court Web site should have been created in the Silicon Valley. Even so, it was an unexpected honor last year when the Superior Court of Santa Clara County's Web site was awarded first prize among court Web sites around the world by JusticeServed (an alliance of court management and justice experts), and more recently the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) selected it as one of the 10 best court Web sites in the United States and Canada.

In granting these awards, JusticeServed and the NCSC noted particular features for special recognition. These included online case status (such as court calendars, case indexes, and registers of actions), juror status, self-help services, cross-county collaboration for interactive forms assistance, and a site for complex civil litigation.

In designing our Web site, we had to keep in mind the variety of users we needed to service. Our Web users range from pro per litigants to private attorneys, law librarians, and staff of other California courts. Although our focus is to provide services and support to those in our local community, we also serve users in many other jurisdictions.

The court's Web presence is actually composed of four separate sites: the court's main site, the Public Access Case Information site, the complex civil litigation site, and the self-service site.

MAIN COURT WEB SITE

The court's main site (www.sccsuperiorcourt.org) is the portal to our other Web sites and contains both courtwide information—such as news, employment opportunities, and history—and department-specific information. Between 2002 and 2004, this site grew from about a dozen pages to over 1,000 pages. It now provides the public with online access to:

- Local forms and links to state and interactive forms;
- Local rules and links to state rules;
- Proposed changes to local rules and forms (during the period for public review);
- Local bail schedule and a link to the state bail schedule;
- Local fees;
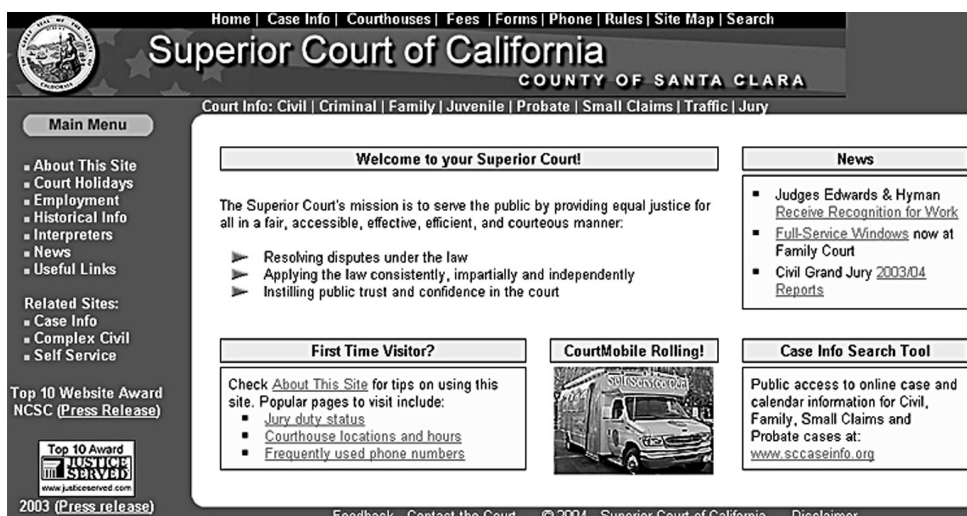
- Hours, locations, and directions for court facilities, as well as phone numbers; and
- Press releases of interest to the public.

Each division of the court (civil, family, criminal, etc.) has a section on the main court site, with subsections specific to that division. For example, the civil section of the site has a page on telephonic appearance, as well as pages with information on judicial mediators and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mediators and neutrals. A database of both ADR professionals and neutrals can be searched online by criteria such as location, specialty, and hourly fee.

The information on the main Web site is updated daily and includes:

- Case status information (calendared cases, case indexes, and registers of action);
- Juror reporting status (date and time by group number, updated several times a day);
- Probate preapproved cases (updated daily); and
- Family ex parte restraining orders ready for pickup (updated several times a day by the family court document examiners).

The currency of information on our sites prompted one recent user to exclaim, "Just a word of thanks for this time-saving feature! It is so much better than using the telephone to check status. Thanks . . . to those that update it several times each day!"

The current year's civil grand jury reports and archived reports from past years are also available on the main site. In addition, online recruitment for new members of the civil grand jury is done on this site, and having it online has increased the number of applications.

Use of the main site has grown steadily. There were 32,199 visits and 107,555 page views in January 2003. One year later, in January 2004, visits had increased to 121,268, and there were 339,228 page

views. The site is linked to 3,905 pages at 921 external Web sites.

PUBLIC ACCESS WEB SITE

Launched in 2003, the Public Access Case Information site (www.sccaseinfo.org) allows the public to access data in the court's case management system without having to visit the courthouse. Currently, this site contains searchable civil, family, probate, and small claims case information for nonconfidential cases. Confidential cases, such as adoption, confidential paternity, juvenile delinquency and dependency, and mental health, are not included on the site, nor are sealed cases and sealed or confidential parties and documents from nonconfidential cases. Traffic and criminal cases will be added to the site over the next two years, thus completing the implementation.

Searching for case and calendar information at this site is extremely flexible. Cases are searchable by calendar date or by case index. Users can find calendared cases within a date range by case number, case title, party name, department, or attorney. The case index can also be searched by case number, case title, party name, attorney name, or case information, including filed date, disposed date, case status (open and/or disposed), and category within a case type. For example, users can search the case index for civil cases, within the civil case database for unlawful detainer cases, and within those cases for commercial or residential units.

The case data are extracted from an internal database each weeknight, and the site's home page indicates the date and time when the database was last refreshed. The information displayed for a specific case includes the case title, case number, status, associated cases, a list of the parties, calendared events, and documents, with filing dates and rulings. Cases available at the site go back 15 years and, for certain lengthy probate cases, as far

The Santa Clara County court's Web site has won awards from JusticeServed and the National Center for State Courts.

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Superior Court of Santa Clara County

Santa Clara's CourtMobile

back as the 1970s. The system will be an even more valuable resource for the public when traffic and criminal cases are added to the database later this year.

COMPLEX CIVIL LITIGATION WEB SITE

Our court was one of six pilot project counties in California to establish complex litigation specialty courts under a grant from the Administrative Office of the Courts. The complex civil litigation Web site (www.sccomplex.org) is a remotely accessible source of information about all pending complex cases and permits parties to electronically file and serve papers in qualifying cases.

Pleading documents are submitted directly online by the parties themselves. Submittal is through an online, menu-driven interface available to anyone who has a system user ID. Discovery documents are sent to a scanning vendor, who scans and indexes the documents and then submits them to the repository. When documents are submitted in a case, the Web service sends an automatic e-mail notice of availability to the parties who have signed up for this service.

Any party can find all filed documents in a particular case by logging on to the Web site and then doing a search. The public will have the same access to all documents that would be available in a paper file at the courthouse. The information for each case includes case statistics, the list of parties and attorneys involved in the case, and an index of pleading and discovery documents submitted for the case. Users can access individual documents from the document index.

The site's sections include:
* Department 17 rules and information;
* Complex litigation calendar;

* News and Announcements: new developments in the Complex Litigation Pilot Project, including a new case management form and information about a new mediation service;
* Model Orders: useful templates for generating new orders; and
* A user guide that provides tips on navigating through the information on the Web site and using the search and document submittal functions.

SELF SERVICE CENTER WEB SITE

In 2001 we initiated the first grant-funded Self Service Center Web site (www.scselfservice.org) as part of a courtwide long-range strategic planning project. That project addressed the need of self-represented litigants and others to have increased access to court services by providing information to the public in a new form. The self-service site was designed to provide information and forms for self-represented litigants. Additional grant money made it possible to expand, redesign, and relaunch the site in early 2003.

The Web site provides information on how civil, small claims, family, probate, juvenile, criminal, and traffic matters are handled in the court. Each department's section of the Web site begins with a description of the types of information available in that section—for example, the Restraining Order Help Center tells users what it does, where it's located, and when it's open. Similar information is given on the Self Service Center page and the page for the CourtMobile page (a traveling self-service center). Each division's section has links to the judicial branch Web site, to local court rules and forms on the court's main Web site, and to other useful resources outside the court. An interactive glossary of legal terms is also included.

Each division's section has a page with a comprehensive list of resources available to the public. For example, the Family Court page lists resources for domestic violence victims, such as counseling, shelters, treatment programs, and legal aid. The Juvenile Delinquency Court resources page provides information on community support programs, such as the Restorative Justice Program, Victim-Offender Mediation Program,

and Fresh Lifelines for Youth program.

Users can submit feedback either through an online form or by e-mail. Division-specific e-mails (such as questions on traffic school or small claims filings) are answered directly by operations staff. The court's Web manager handles general and Web-related feedback. A frequently asked questions (FAQs) page reduces recurring questions from the public. Public feedback has proven to be a valuable resource for improving the site. In addition, it is encouraging to hear how helpful the site is to the public. A recent e-mail stated, "Your Web site was a Godsend! The forms were extremely helpful. I'm not sure what I would have done without them! Thank you!"

Access to justice is directly related to the ability to understand proceedings in which court users are involved. Based on the diverse language needs of the residents of our county, the court has translated the Self Service Center Web site into plain English, and we are currently working on Spanish and Vietnamese versions.

Some of the highlights of this site are:
* Comprehensive treatment of all aspects of court operations;
* User-friendly low-bandwidth graphics, including illustrations and flowcharts;
* A significant number of referrals to other resources in the local community, as well as in the state and nation;
* A comprehensive and searchable glossary linked to specialized terms used on the site;
* A search function that permits users to find words or phrases;
* An FAQs section for each unit of the court; and
* A feedback system that enables the court to obtain comments from users about ways in which the site is helpful and how it can be made easier to use.

CONCLUSION

Accuracy, completeness, innovation, and continuous improvement are the goals for our court's Web site. With the history and strengths of the high-technology community we serve, we can do no less than provide a first-rate Internet vehicle for addressing the public's need for information from the court. ■

"Based on the diverse language needs of the residents of our county, the court has translated the Self Service Center Web site into plain English, and we are currently working on Spanish and Vietnamese versions."

Our regular column about applying your technological savvy to leisure activities

At Home

FAVORITE WEB SITE:

Custom Picture Frames Made Easy

Paul C. Davis

One of my favorite Internet stores is www.pictureframes.com, where you can order custom picture frame kits. A great new feature on this site is that you can preview exactly what your picture will look like when framed.

All you have to do is click on the "personal frame shop" tab to begin the process. First you upload a digital image of the item you want to frame. If you are buying artwork on the Internet, you may be able to download an image of the item from the place of purchase. If not, you can upload a digital image of your artwork to your computer from your camera or from a scanned image, use the imaging software that came with your camera to crop the photo so only the artwork is visible, and save the cropped photo as a JPG file.

After uploading the image to www.pictureframes.com, you specify the actual image size in inches. Next you select a frame (they have a huge selection organized into categories), the type of matting, the glass (regular or nonglare acrylic), and corrugated cardboard or foam-core backing.

You can choose either an inexpensive ready-made frame that comes in a selection of fixed sizes (which limits your control over mat border width) or a custom-made frame (which gives you total control over the matting width).

The whole process is interactive, so when you change the mat border width, the frame size automatically changes. Results are displayed on the screen, and the complete framed image can be opened in a separate full-screen window.

I found the color accuracy of the images to be very good. Using this feature enabled me to try out lots of different frames and mat combinations until I found exactly what I wanted. You can also select from a limited number of background colors to see how your framed picture will look on your wall.

After you have made all your selections, you will be shown a total price that includes your frame, mat, and glass. From here you can make your payment, and a few weeks later, you'll receive your frame in the mail. ■

An Interview with Patricia Yerian

Patricia Yerian

We are lucky to have Pat Yerian, the director of the AOC's Information Services (IS) Division, for this interview. She will discuss some IS projects that affect the trial courts.

TechGuide: Pat, can you start by explaining the relationship between IS and the trial courts and how it has changed over the time you've been with the AOC?
Pat Yerian: In the past, the IS Division's primary role was to provide technology support to the AOC and the appellate courts. The division, as staff to the Court Technology Advisory Committee (CTAC) and the Judicial Council, also provided guidance on technology policy, planning, and funding. Today, while continuing to provide those same services, the IS Division is more directly involved in assisting in transforming the branch's information technology into a cohesive, statewide system.

In its role as staff to CTAC, the IS Division assists the committee in its mission to promote, coordinate, and facilitate the application of technology to the work of the courts. The committee is also charged with recommending standards to ensure technological compatibility; facilitating court technology projects funded in whole or in part by the state; proposing rules, standards, or legislation to ensure privacy, access, and security; and assisting courts in acquiring and developing useful technology systems.

TechGuide: What's the current status of the pilot project on developing a branch-wide case management software system? How is IS involved in this project?
Pat Yerian: The branch has actually moved beyond the pilot phase of the California Case Management System (CCMS). IS and the Court Oversight Committee consisting of six PJs and chaired by Sheila Gonzalez, Administrative Director of the Southern Regional Office, have prepared for the first implementation of the criminal and traffic components of the CCMS in the Alameda County Superior Court. Testing is currently under way and implementation is planned for late this year.

Concurrently, the same group has begun development of the civil case components of the new application, and the new components are targeted for completion within two years.

TechGuide: What will be the advantages to a trial court in adopting the system once it is successfully tested?
Pat Yerian: With the advent of unification and state funding, the judicial branch is in a unique situation, and the opportunities for developing and implementing new technologies during this rare window of time are tremendous. A uniform case management system developed by and for the state courts provides one of the best examples of how technology can create great economic savings and, more importantly, provide the courts with a valuable tool to dispense justice more equitably and efficiently. The uniform case management system will dramatically increase the ease of access to judicial branch services and information for court staff, judicial officers, the bar, the public, the media, and other state, local, and federal justice partners.

The new CCMS and its partner application being developed by the AOC and appellate courts, the Appellate Case Management System, will provide greater automated integration between the superior and appellate courts and ease the amount of work needed to transfer cases between the courts.

With a single system, economies of scale, and the need to make changes to a single system rather than to the more than 70 systems in the branch today, money and resources will be freed up for other technology needs in the branch.

TechGuide: Are there any other initiatives that IS is or will be undertaking that will affect the trial courts?
Pat Yerian: With a unified statewide court system, we've seen an entirely new set of technology needs surface. Aside from the CCMS project, the IS Division is working with trial courts on many of these needs, including:

• Local and Wide Area Network (LAN/WAN) infrastructure upgrades;
• Jury system improvements;
• Interim, shared case management systems for courts with urgent needs;
• Implementation of the Court Accounting and Reporting System, a financial application, with the AOC Finance Division; and
• A trial court human resources management information system with the AOC Human Resources Division.

In addition, in responding to the need for a centralized data center and infrastructure to maintain and support these branchwide systems, the IS Division, working with the courts and Siemens Business Services (SBS), established the California Courts Data Center at an SBS facility in Newark, California.

TechGuide: What do you see happening in the use of technology in the AOC and the courts over the next 5 to 10 years?
Pat Yerian: To be successful, all of our current and planned technology projects need policies, procedures, standards, and funding. We are working continuously with the Judicial Council and the courts to develop and implement precisely these important support mechanisms.

Working with the Judicial Council and CTAC and in partnerships with the courts, we will continue to transform our processes to promote the branch's goals of increasing public access and dispensing justice fairly and efficiently.

TechGuide: Thanks for agreeing to do this interview. ■

> *"With the advent of unification and state funding, the judicial branch is in a unique situation, and the opportunities for developing and implementing new technologies during this rare window of time are tremendous."*

Hoax E-Mails

How often do we get e-mails from friends warning us about the newest and most evil virus yet discovered? These e-mails usually tell you to pass along the warning to all your friends to prevent a catastrophe. If you receive such an e-mail, you can easily check to see if it's a hoax by going to www.symantec.com /avcenter/hoax.html or www.truthorfiction .com, or you can do a search for "hoax e-mail" on Google, where you'll find many other sites to check the validity of the e-mail you received.

TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING A HOAX E-MAIL
Here are some tips from www.urban legends.about.com for identifying an e-mail hoax:
• Note whether the text you've received was actually written by the person who sent it. Did anyone sign his or her name to it? If not, be skeptical.
• Look for the telltale phrase, "Forward this to everyone you know!" The more urgent the plea, the more suspect the message.
• Look for statements like "This is NOT a hoax" or "This is NOT an urban legend." They typically mean the opposite of what they say.

• Watch for overly emphatic language, as well as frequent use of UPPERCASE LETTERS and multiple exclamation points!!!!!!!
• If the text seems aimed more at persuading than informing the reader, be suspicious. Like propagandists, hoaxers are more interested in pushing people's emotional buttons than communicating accurate information.
• If the message purports to impart extremely important information that you've never heard of before or read elsewhere in legitimate venues, be very suspicious.
• Read carefully and think critically about what the message says, looking for logical inconsistencies, violations of common sense, and blatantly false claims.
• Look for subtle or not so subtle jokes—indications that the author is pulling your leg.
• Check for references to outside sources of information. Hoaxes don't typically cite verifiable evidence nor link to Web sites with corroborating information.
• Check to see if the message has been debunked by Web sites that debunk urban legends and Internet hoaxes.
• Research any factual claims in the text to see if there is published evidence to support them. If you find none, odds are you've been the recipient of an e-mail hoax.

OTHER DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS
Virtually any e-mail chain letter you receive (i.e., any message forwarded multiple times before it got to you) is more likely to be false than true. You should automatically be skeptical of chain letters.

Hoaxers usually try every means available to make their lies believable, such as mimicking a journalistic style, attributing the text to a legitimate source, or implying that powerful corporate or government interests have tried to keep the information from you.

Be especially wary of health-related rumors. Most importantly, never act on "medical information" forwarded from unknown sources without first verifying its accuracy with a doctor or another reliable source.

EXAMPLE OF A HOAX E-MAIL
In the sidebar at right is an example of a hoax e-mail that was circulated among AOC computer users, instructing them to remove a file called jdbgmgr.exe from their system. The file that the e-mail tells the receiver to delete is actually supposed to be on the system.


EXAMPLE OF A HOAX E-MAIL

I found out this morning from someone in my address book that there is one of those viruses out there that goes into your address book and sends itself to every name listed. As I was in her address book, it did indeed turn out to be on my hard drive. It was quite simple to delete.

The unfortunate thing about this virus, jdbgmgr.exe, is that it's supposed to be so new, neither Norton or McAfee are supposed to detect it. My understanding is it sits quietly for 14 days and then does its mischief. To get rid of it, you must do the following in Windows:

1. Go to start, then to your find or search option.
2. Type jdbgmgr.exe as the name of the file you are looking for and set it to search all hard drives and folders.
3. Press "find now" or "search."
4. If the virus is found, it will have a "teddy bear" icon. DON'T OPEN IT.
5. Right-click on the name (do not left-click!) to bring down a drop down menu and select "delete."
6. Go into the Recycle Bin and delete it from the Recycle Bin.
7. Go into your address book and send a copy of this message or a message with it. ■

California Judges Electronic Benchguides
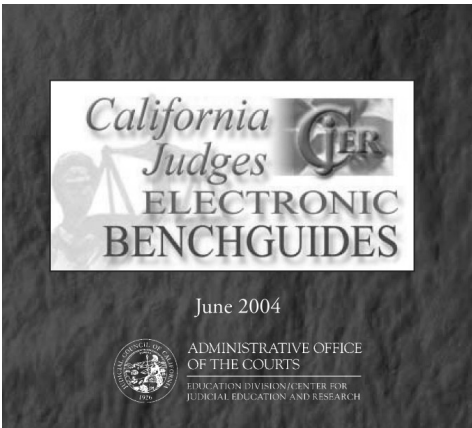
C JER recently released the sixth edition of the *California Judges Electronic Benchguides* CD-ROM for California judicial officers. The *Benchguides* CD-ROM allows you to quickly search and retrieve the information contained in all of CJER's benchguides on criminal, civil, and juvenile court proceedings. It may be used with Windows® 95, 98, 2000, NT, or XP. Here are some of the features:

EASY NAVIGATION
Navigation in the Benchguides CD-ROM is as easy as 1-2-3. There are three windows, or panes, in which to view information: (1) the text of a benchguide or case, (2) an expandable table of contents of each benchguide or a list of cases, and (3) the

text of hits after a search. You have three viewing choices: all three panes at once on the screen, each pane as a full screen, or a combination of two panes.

EXPANDABLE TABLE OF CONTENTS
In the contents pane, you can expand or collapse the headings and subheadings to view the table of contents in as much detail as you wish. Clicking on any of the contents sections or subsections will take you to that part of the text.

POWERFUL SEARCH FUNCTION
Because every word in the benchguides is indexed, you can perform a simple query for one word or an advanced query for a combination of words.

FOCUSED SEARCH
You can search the entire set of benchguides, or you can limit your search to specific benchguides or specific sections of benchguides.

LINKS TO CASES
All California cases cited in the benchguides are linked to the text of the cases themselves. In the cases, headnote numbers are linked to the headnote topics.

ANNOTATION TOOLS
You can personalize the benchguides using annotation tools that enable you

to highlight, bookmark, or add notes to the text.
- Electronic highlighters. You can mark the benchguide text with the electronic highlighter pen in your choice of colors. You will later be able to search for words inside highlighted text or for text highlighted with a particular color.
- Bookmarks. You can insert bookmarks in the benchguide text to mark places for future reference.
- Notes. You can add notes to any paragraph in a benchguide to remind you of important information, such as a recent court opinion or an amendment to a statute.

PRINTING AND EXPORTING FILES
You can print portions of the benchguide text or export portions to a different file format, such as that of your word processor.

MORE BENCHGUIDES IN THE FUTURE
Future editions of the *California Judges Electronic Benchguides* CD-ROM will include CJER's new benchguide series on family law proceedings.

TO ORDER
The *California Judges Electronic Benchguides* CD-ROM is available free of charge to all California judicial officers. To order, please call Kathy Pearce at 415-865-7805. ■

End Notes

W hen I told a friend that I was going to write about the *TechGuide*'s five-year anniversary in this End Notes column, and she teasingly (at least I think she was teasing) said, "What happened? Did you run out of family members to write about?" The answer is no, I haven't run out of family stories, but five years is a significant amount of time, especially for a periodical specializing in technology. It's now time to look back at where we've been and to assess where we go from here. It also gives me an excuse to look back over our almost 20 issues of the *TechGuide*, which on the whole hold up pretty well, even though some of the topics from the early issues seem about as dated now as a polyester leisure suit from the '70s.

Five years ago this month we published the first issue of the *TechGuide*. It was 24 pages long and contained exciting (at least to us) articles on electronic legal research, an introduction to the Internet from a judge's perspective, short descriptions of the Serranus Web site and JBRadio, and tips and tricks on using Netscape Navigator. It also included a note from retired Judge Judith Ford, who wrote, "The guide is intended not only for accomplished 'techies' but for judges at all levels of

technological skill—novices as well as the proficient—who wish to benefit from the considerable resources available to us."

We've been true to Judge Ford's description, and we've covered a lot of ground in the past five years. In reviewing that first issue, it's impossible not to notice that Netscape is now a second-rate player in the browser world. Serranus has had several face-lifts and has morphed into a portal site that also provides content. JBRadio is no longer a novelty; it's a real alternative for court officers to see or hear missed institutes and to view CJER's library of videotapes. And an introduction to the Internet or electronic legal research no longer seems to be needed, because they are now so much a part of our work lives. Instead, what's needed are tips for using these tools more efficiently and productively.

We've interviewed many of your judicial colleagues and members of the AOC to put a face on the users and providers of technology. And for the last couple of years, we've been highlighting the impressive uses various courts have made of new technology. We've devoted an entire issue to favorite tips and tricks. We even used cartoons to liven up some issues. Through it all we've tried to keep

to a middle ground— that is, not getting too technical and staying as relevant as possible to the interests of our readers. Although we admire the true techies and acknowledge the benefits of using technology, we've maintained just a healthy bit of skepticism about the sometimes extravagant claim that technology will be our salvation. Instead, we've tried to put a human face on the use of technology and give practical tips for using it.

So where do we go from here?

Data from our Education Technology Unit, which conducts the computer classes for judges, tell us that enrollments for basic computers classes are down while enrollments for more advanced classes are up. We also see that the computer courses are being incorporated in our regular educational forums. Technology may now have become so incorporated in our daily lives that a periodical promoting it has outlived its usefulness. It may be that it's time to declare victory and move on in order to use our resources in creating more online learning opportunities. We're open to your thoughts. See you on the Web.

Bob Schindewolf

Bob Schindewolf

> *"Technology may now have become so incorporated in our daily lives that a periodical promoting it has outlived its usefulness. It may be that it's time to declare victory and move on in order to use our resources in creating more online learning opportunities."*